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Factors which influence Foreign Policy of Bhutan

Abstract

This article discusses the factors which play a major role in shaping the foreign policy of Bhutan. How Bhutan, a tiny landlocked country and the youngest democracy in the world gets influence by the behavior and interest of the neighboring big powers: India and China. This article will look into many facets of Bhutan to understand its foreign policy-making, such as Location, Political institutions, Security, Economy and Gross National Happiness.

Keywords: *Foreign Policy of Bhutan, Foreign Policy Factors, Land-locked States, Buffer States, Gross National Happiness, Bhutan, South Asia, Weak States, India, China, Bhutan between India and China*

Introduction

Bhutan, also called Druk Yul, is a Himalayan Buddhist Kingdom in South Asia located between India and China. Bhutan is a small landlocked country with limited economic scope and military power. It is situated in the eastern Himalayas and borders by 470 kilometers to the north and northwest Tibet (China's Xizang Autonomous Region), and by 670 kilometers India. To the west Bhutan shares its border with India's state of Sikkim, West Bengal to the southwest, Assam to the south and southwest, Arunachala Pradesh to the east. Sikkim, an eighty-eight-kilometer-wide territory, divides Bhutan from Nepal, while West Bengal separates Bhutan from Bangladesh by only sixty kilometers. In World's country comparison, Bhutan is the 137 largest country with a total area of 38,394 sq. km, which is entirely landmass.¹ Bhutan's capital city, Thimpu, is centrally located towards the country's western border with India. Bhutan was never colonized unlike its neighboring countries. Bhutan was also spared percussion from the two World Wars and the Cold War, which led to major instability and alignments in case of other countries.

This paper aims to study the role of Bhutan as a buffer state between the two emerging world powers of India and China. In the study of Bhutan, its smallness is irrelevant as its importance is enhanced due to the geopolitical and geostrategic location by being the buffer state between India and China. Bhutan's case is a very unique one as Bhutan was in a self-imposed isolation and completely cut off from the remaining world for many centuries until around 1960, and it is the youngest democracy in the world. Study and researches about this country has been neglected by scholars for many years mainly due to the isolation, remoteness and smallness of the country except a handful of researches on the bilateral friendship between Bhutan and India. As the world debates shifting of the world power to Asia from the West, the role

¹ Central Intelligence Agency, „The World Factbook”. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bt.html>

of this small kingdom will play a very important role in balancing the world power.

The friendship between the world's smallest and the largest democracy, Bhutan and India, is evident and talked over since many decades. Bhutan has always kept its distance from China after the Tibet issue, but as China is becoming the fastest growing world power, Bhutan can no longer ignore and have to play the role of a balancer more cautiously now.

This paper focuses on the period between 2008-2015, when the country had held its first and subsequently the second National Assembly Elections and this is the time when the country was on the threshold of its transition. Being a small country, Bhutan has many sensitive issues. However the most sensitive issue for the Bhutanese society has always been the preservation of its sovereignty, territorial integrity and its security.

Factors and Circumstances shaping Bhutan's Foreign Policy

The role of Foreign Policy is very important for the peace and progress of every country in today's World. Every nation strive to be self-reliant and for the nation to be self-reliant, the nation has to play along and depend on other nations. Foreign Policy is the set of principles or guidelines adopted by the nations to give a meaning and direction to its behavior in the international relations. Foreign Policy is also an instrument, or an activity of the state with which it aims to fulfil and serve the national interest and goals in the international arena. There are numerous explanations and interpretations of Foreign Policy by the various political scientist.

Rosenau defines "Foreign Policy as a systematic decision-making by constitutional authorized officials of individual states. Their intention is to maintain, or change the state of affairs in the international system in line with an objective, or objectives they or their superiors have chosen."² According to

² Political Science and Public Policy, edited by James N. Rosenau (Chicago 1968). 222

George Modelski, "Foreign Policy involves all activities of a nation by which that nation is trying to change the behavior of other nations and to adjust its own behavior in the international environment."³ He also adds that Foreign Policy always aims at successfully changing the behavior of other nations. Crabb defines Foreign Policy in a very simple way, which is also one of the most effective definitions: 'National objectives' that should be the goal and the 'means' that should be used in the process of attaining this goal. The interaction between objectives and means is the essence of 'statesmanship', and of 'foreign policy'.⁴ Hadfield and Dunne define "foreign policy as the strategy, or approach chosen by the national government to achieve its goals in its relations with external entities."⁵

I. Geo-strategic Location

Geography is the foremost and primary determinant of Bhutan's foreign policy. The location, size and shape of the country are the main geographical factors influencing the foreign policy of Bhutan. Bhutan is a strategic buffer state between two nuclear giants, India and China. Its rugged mountain terrain and a landlocked location in the Himalayas have certain implications on the world view and the security perception in Bhutan. UN - OHRLLS (United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States), which supports the special needs of smaller nations, describes "lack of territorial access to the sea, remoteness and isolation from world markets and high transit cost continue to impose serious constraints on the overall socio-economic development of landlocked developing countries. Their sea-borne trade unavoidably depends on transit through other countries. Additional border crossings and long distance from the market substantially increase the

³ George Modelski, *A theory of Foreign Policy*, Princeton University, 1962

⁴ Cecil V. Crabb Jr., *American Foreign Policy in the Nuclear Age*, New York 1988, 1

⁵ Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield, Tim Dunne (eds.), *Foreign Policy - Theories, Actors, Cases*, Oxford 2008, 12

total expenses for the transport services”⁶ as a primary restraint faced by landlocked states.

The Kingdom of Bhutan at a first glimpse would not seem to be a country that would influence heavily the regional power calculation. A country, whose size and landmass is smaller than Switzerland and ranks 136th in the Countries of the World by Area⁷, ranks 163th of Countries in the World ranked by 2014 population⁸. This tiny landlocked Himalayan country however become increasingly influential strategically to both India and China. The reason for the increase in the importance of Bhutan to these two giants is not because of untapped mineral riches, or a large consumer class. It is because of three geographical features which make Bhutan a very important strategic location for India and China.

Firstly, Bhutan does not have any access to either the sea or any other third country without passing through either India’s or China’s land or airspace. Secondly Bhutan controls numerous historical trade routes between the two nations, India and China. Thirdly, Bhutan is an important buffer for the Siliguri Corridor, also known as the ‘chicken’s neck’, which measures twenty-five kilometers at the narrowest point. Through this narrow road run the roads and rail lines between India’s North east and the remaining parts of India.⁹

Bhutan followed a self-imposed isolation policy and was largely cut off from the rest of the world until the 1950s, even television was not legalized until 1999. As Bhutan started opening up in the recent years to the outside world, the country finds itself engaged in a cautious but considerable diplomatic battle between India and China. The core of this issue is nothing else than Bhutan’s territorial disputes with China.

⁶ <http://unohrlls.org/about-lldc/>

⁷ http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/countries_by_area.htm

⁸ <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/population-by-country/>

⁹ Protracted Contest „John W Garver” P. 96

Map 1: India's troubled northeast



There are three territorial disputes between Bhutan and China¹⁰. Both China and Bhutan claim the 495 square kilometer area of Pasamlung and Jakarlung valleys as part of their respective countries in the central sector and 269 square kilometer area in the western sector¹¹. The Pasamlung and the Jakarlun valleys are of interest to China because of its closeness to Tibet but China envy Doklam Plateau the most. India is deeply worried because of China's claim to these areas and India's Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS) describes the strategic value of the region: "The Doklam Plateau lies immediately east of Indian defenses in Sikkim. Chinese occupation of Doklam would turn the flank of Indian defenses completely. This piece of dominating ground not only has a commanding view of the Chumbi Valley but also overlooks the Siliguri Corridor further to the east."¹²

2. Political Institutions

There are many definitions of political institutions by various political scientist. Peters and Pierre define political institutions as "it refers not only to formal political organizations such as political parties and parliament, but also to

¹⁰ Medha Bisht, "Sino-Bhutan Boundary Negotiations", IDSA Comment, 19.1.2010, - See more at: <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/node/1747#sthash.jtpZj9E3.dpuf>

¹¹ Himalayan Frontiers of India: K Warikoo P.151

¹² Prakash Katoch, Dealing with Doklam, March 2013, Centre for Land Warfare Studies, <http://www.claws.in/985/dealing-with-doklam-prakash-katoch.html>

informal constraints such as customs, ideals, guideline and actions”. David Wiens, 2012, emphasizes that these formal and informal rules establish and stabilize roles. Moreover, Garret & Lange, 1995 expressed that “there is no consensus amongst theorists of what makes an institution political”. Based on the Stanford Encyclopedia’s definition of Social institutions, Political institutions can also be de defined in the same way. Social institutions are defined by the Stanford Encyclopedia as „sets of rules and norms that organize human activities within a society”. Similarly political institutions can be defined as “sets of rules and norms that organize political activity”. These institutions do not need to be drafted or penned down, but they should be imposed, or socially accepted.

Monarchy

Figure 1: Monarch and Reign¹³



Source: <http://www.bhutandnc.com/bhutantodayjan06.htm>

¹³ <http://www.bhutandnc.com/bhutantodayjan06.htm>

The smallest Himalayan country in South Asia, the Kingdom of Bhutan came out after one hundred years of rule by absolute monarchy as a parliamentary democracy with the constitutional head as the monarch on the top. Bhutan was in self-isolation for many decades, until it came under the rule of the fourth king of Wangchuck dynasty, King Jigme Singye Wangchuk in 1972 after the death of his father, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk. The Fourth King has been vested with absolute powers during most of his reign and he was not under any internal, or external pressure to begin the path to political modernization. Bhutan, with the support of India, was living in peace and tranquility during that time and could have continued to live the same way for several more years. Changes in the political system in any country happen usually due to the result of long and painful social and political struggle conducted in the event of economic underdevelopment or oppression. Example of such a political change was witnessed by Nepal, one of the neighboring country of Bhutan.

The wind of change which blew through Bhutan was different, however, since King Jigme Singye Wangchuk was a genuine reformer and he was keen to follow his own path to reach an objective that has been the crucial lead of his regime, leading Bhutan on the way to modernization and decentralization. This path then in the course of time would have lead to participation and democratization, and transforming an hereditary absolute system of government into a constitutional monarchy. His institutional reforms have been organized under three major headings: decentralization, devolution of his own powers, and good governance, paving the way for the constitution. On the contrary and unlike the practice of most monarchical systems in the world, modesty has been the heraldry of King Singye Wangcguk, whose style of living and ruling has been as close to the people as it can be in such a regime. His decision to give full executive powers to an elected cabinet, and to submit himself to a vote of confidence give manifestation about his personal vision: "The time has now come to promote greater people's participation in the decision making process. Our country must be ensured to always have a

system of government which enjoys the mandate of the people, provides and efficient governance, and also has an inbuilt mechanism of checks and balances to safeguard our national interest and security".¹⁴ In 1999, the Jigme Singye Wangchuk created a body of Council of Ministers called the "Lhengye Zhutshong" and the Druk Gyalpo as the Head of State. Lhengye Zhutshong exercised the executive powers, while the government and the former Grand National Assembly was vested with the legislative powers.

On December 17, 2005, King Jigme Singye Wangchuk announced to a stunned nation that the first general elections would be held in 2008, and he would abdicate the throne in favor of his eldest son, the crown prince. King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk took the throne on December 14, 2006 upon his father's abdication. Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk was adorned with Bhutan's Raven Crown at an ornate coronation ceremony in Thimpu on November 6, 2008, becoming the world's youngest reigning monarch and head of the newest democracy.¹⁵ The young king began his reign by overseeing the democratization of his country by presiding over the last sessions of the parliament where electoral laws, land reform and other important issues were deliberated¹⁶. He stated that the responsibility of this generation of Bhutanese was to ensure the success of democracy. He traveled extensively to explain and discuss the Draft Constitution of Bhutan with the people, and to encourage participation in the upcoming democratic exercises. He continues such visits, speaking mainly to the youth of Bhutan on the need for Bhutanese to strive for greater standards in education, business, civil service and the need for people of a small country to work harder than those of others.¹⁷

He signed a new treaty of friendship with India in February 2007, replacing the treaty of 1949.¹⁸ Number of government actions were initiated by the new King,

¹⁴ Kuensel, August 29, 1998.

¹⁵ Bhutan Foreign Policy and government guide, P 65

¹⁶ "Last National Assembly session begins". Bhutan Observer. 19 January 2008. Retrieved 6 November 2008.

¹⁷ "His Majesty to attend mock election in Dungkhar". Kuensel. 22 April 2007. Retrieved 6 November 2008.

¹⁸ Bhutan and India sign new treaty". BBC. 8 February 2007. Retrieved 6 November 2008.

King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk with a prospect to strengthen the system in the establishment for the democratic changes in 2008. The first elected Parliament adopted the Constitution of Bhutan was adopted on 18 July 2008. His first landmark project after his formal coronation was launching the National Cadastral Resurvey in March 2009, aimed at resolving long-standing land issues of excess land that affects every Bhutanese household.¹⁹

The National Assembly (The Tshongdu)

In 1943, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk established the National Assembly. King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk instituted to established the National Assembly to promote political awareness among the his people and also to allow them a greater say in the country's functioning. Any gathering held to discuss the common interest is termed as "Jomdu" in Bhutan and termed as "Tshongdu" if the gathering is in large numbers. Hence, the name, "The Tshingdu" for the "The National Assembly". The primary responsibility of the National Assembly are to execute laws, approve senior appointments in the government and advise on all matters of national importance.

There are three reasons for the establishment of the National Assembly. Firstly The representatives of the people shall assemble to articulate the issues of the people and provide solutions to their problems. Secondly, The Assembly will come up with plans and ideas to benefit the development of the kingdom, and strengthen it. Thirdly, The Assembly will record accounts of revenues in the Kingdom as well as annual expenditure incurred for the government, and for development purposes.²⁰

The National Assembly of Bhutan was unicameral representative body until the introduction of parliamentary democracy which brought Bhutan its bicameral Parliament (the National Council and the National Assembly). It had been the highest decision-making body in the country. The 1954 constitution of the National Assembly had that His Majesty reserved the right to amend all its

¹⁹ "A promise is kept". Kuenselonline.com. 14 March 2009.

²⁰ <http://www.nab.gov.bt/en/about/parliament-history>

decisions. However, in 1968 it was decided that the decisions of the National Assembly would be final and binding from then on, and not even His Majesty would be allowed to amend them. Should he have had misgivings about the soundness of the Assembly's decisions, he would have addressed the Assembly to propose to reconsider the decisions. King proposed to make the National Assembly a sovereign institution and the Assembly members endorsed it. Strengthening the National Assembly as a supreme body, the king introduced the vote of no confidence in monarchy despite the Assembly's outright rejection in three consecutive sessions. The introduction of vote of no confidence in the Monarchy meant the King surrendered his veto power and vested all the legislative power in the National Assembly. In 1998, the Fourth King empowered the National Assembly to elect the council of ministers who would be entrusted with the responsibility to take care of the governance affairs of the country. The Assembly was also empowered to develop a mechanism for registering a vote of confidence in King. The National Assembly was formally dissolved in 2007 in the lead-up to Bhutan's historic transition to parliamentary democracy in 2007 – exactly after 100 years of progressive monarchical rule²¹.

The current National Assembly is the second one since the Kingdom of Bhutan transitioned to parliamentary democracy in 2007. The first democratically elected National Assembly completed its tenure in 2013. The House is one of the Chambers of Bhutan's bicameral Parliament. There are two political parties in the National Assembly – People's Democratic Party (PDP) and Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT). Elections to the National Assembly take place in two tiers – primary round and the general election. Political parties registered with the Election Commission of Bhutan contest the primary round. The two political parties that get the highest and the second highest number of total votes cast are qualified to run for the seats in the National Assembly in the general round of election. The party that gets the maximum seats forms the

²¹ <http://www.nab.gov.bt/en/about/parliament-history>

government and the other takes the opposition bench. Today, there are 47 members in the House. PDP is the ruling party and DPT the opposition. The Constitution has a provision that the House shall have a maximum of 55 members, elected from each *dzongkhag* (district) in proportion to its population. However, no *dzongkhag* shall have less than two members or more than seven members. The National Assembly has the legislative, oversight and representational mandates.²²

The Vision of the National Assembly of Bhutan is *“To achieve the Kingdom of Bhutan’s overarching goal of Gross National Happiness enshrined in the Constitution through an inclusive and a vibrant democracy”*. The Mission is *“To effectively carry out legislative, scrutiny, oversight and representational functions to fulfill the aspirations of the Bhutanese people”*. And the core Values of National Assembly of Bhutan are : (i) Professional values & Integrity: We the Members and Secretariat staff of the National Assembly will maintain and promote the highest level of professional values and integrity in our endeavor to promote the National Assembly as an epitome of democratic institution and to serve the people. (ii) Accountability & Result-oriented: We will be judicious in using resources and perform our duties to achieve commendable results. (iii) Ethical values: Integrity, honesty, empathy, transparency, impartiality, probity, and neutrality will be the hallmark of our profession and responsibility. (iv) Democratic values: The National Assembly will champion promoting and deepening democracy by serving the people of Bhutan and abide by the Constitution of the Kingdom both in letter and spirit. (v) Consensus building: The National Assembly will work toward promoting national unity through consensus building in our unique democracy.²³

²² <http://www.nab.gov.bt/en/about/national-assembly>

²³ <http://www.nab.gov.bt/en/about/mission-vision>

The Royal Advisory Council (Lodoi Tsokde)

In 1965, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck established the “The Royal Advisory Council” or “Lodoi Tsokde”. The council consists of nine members and of the nine people, six members represent the people, two members represents the clergy and king nominated one member. The head of the Council is the Chairman called *kalon*. The *kalon* represents the government and is granted the rank of a minister. This council became the highest advisory body in the Bhutan and main task of the council was to advised and assist the King and the ministers in the governance matters. The term of the council is for three years.

Functions and responsibilities of Royal Advisory Council²⁴:

1. The Royal Advisory Council shall be primarily responsible for promoting and safeguarding the trust, confidence and the harmonious relations existing between the Government and the People of the Kingdom. In this regard, should the Council or anyone of it's members become aware of situations or threats that may undermine the security, peace and stability of the Kingdom, such information should be immediately brought to the attention of His Majesty the King.
2. The Royal Advisory Council shall be the guardian of the policies, laws and resolutions passed by the National Assembly and it shall ensure their faithful implementation by the government and the people.
3. The Royal Advisory Council shall endeavor to ascertain whether the national policies, plans and programs are being implemented by the government and the people. Should the Royal Advisory Council, in its judgement, find that this is not the case, it shall bring the matter to the

²⁴ <http://oag.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Rules-Regulation-of-the-Royal-Advisory-Council-1993-English.pdf>

attention of His Majesty the King, and thereafter, if necessary, to the attention of the Lhengyal Shungtsog and the National Assembly.

4. The Royal Advisory Council shall discharge all its functions and responsibilities without fear or favor and with complete impartiality, integrity, loyalty and dedication.
5. The Royal Advisory Council shall render advice to His MAJESTY THE King with utmost dedication, loyalty and sincerity keeping in view the interests of the Kingdom and the wellbeing of the people.
6. Besides participation in the policy and legislative bodies such as the National Assembly and the Lhengyal Shungtsog, the Royal Advisory Council as and when desired by His Majesty the King, shall attend meetings dealing with issues of national importance.
7. Should the Royal Advisory Council find any action or activity of any person or organization including that of the King himself, to be detrimental to the interests of the Kingdom and the People, they shall, without any hesitation whatsoever, report such matters to His Majesty the King and thereafter, if necessary, to the Lhengyal Shungtsog and the National Assembly.

King Jigme Singye Wangchuck further strengthened the position of the Royal Advisory Council in 1984 as the king felt that the council lacked the necessary clout to carry out their important responsibilities even though the council has the authority to advise the king and watch over the performance of the government. The most addition is the inclusion of a clause that states that “if any person, including His Majesty the King, does anything harmful to the

interest of the Kingdom and the people, the Royal Advisory Council without surpassing such matters and free of fear from the quarter shall bring it to the attention of His Majesty the King and, if necessary, even report it to the Cabinet and The National Assembly". The National Assembly strongly objected to this clause empowering the Royal Advisory Council to report against the King. The Assembly felt that it was a violation of traditional values and that it undermined the sacred principles of loyalty and devotion to the throne. His Majesty the King however insisted that this clause was of great importance and was very necessary as no one can predict or guarantee the actions and sense of responsibility to the nation of future rulers.²⁵

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Foreign policy formulation is the most critical task for a country like Bhutan. However, during the first four decades of the 20th century, the foreign policy of Bhutan was not a complex issue for the Kingdom as the basic operating principles of Bhutan's external relations were set by the events surrounding the British Younghusband Expedition into Tibet (1903-05) and the treaty between Bhutan and British India signed in 1910. In Foreign policy terms, then, British India constituted the only potentially complicating factor for the newly-established monarchy in Bhutan in 1907, and it is not surprising that King Ugyen Dorji made a satisfactory accommodation with the British his first order of Business. The British recognized Bhutan's internal sovereignty and did not insist upon the establishment of a "Residency" in Bhutan as they had in Nepal and Sikkim. The only qualification imposed on Bhutan's sovereignty was the clause in the 1910 treaty under which the Bhutanese "agreed to be guided by the advice" of the British on the foreign policy matters.²⁶

After India's independence from British in 1947, the government of India succeeded the role of the British and the Himalayan Kingdoms of Nepal,

²⁵ Bhutan Country Study Guide, Volume 1 strategic information and developments, p.75

²⁶ Pacific Affairs, Leo E. Rose, p.192

Sikkim, Tibet and Bhutan had reached an agreement with India. Nepal, Sikkim and Tibet signed a “standstill agreement” under which these three kingdoms would continue functioning the same way as they had been previously until a new treaty is negotiated. Bhutan and India did not formally sign the standstill agreement, however they acted as if they had signed it. In the summer of 1949, the negotiation for a new Indo-Bhutanese treaty commenced and the treaty was signed on August 8, 1949. Under this treaty Bhutan’s independence was recognized but the treaty included the clause from the 1910 treaty under which the Royal Government of Bhutan agreed to accept Indian guidance on foreign policy²⁷. The new treaty would have had stiffer clause had it been signed after 1950. By 1950 Indians became acutely disturbed by the expressed determination of the new Communist regime in China to “reunite” some territories with the Chinese Motherland. India’s heightened concern was reflected in the secret letters attached to the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship with Nepal and in the retention of Sikkim as a “protectorate” in the 1951 Treaty with Sikkim²⁸.

In October 1950, the Chinese offensive was launched on the eastern frontier against Tibet and another Chinese force moved into Western Tibet from Sinkiang, which is a territory claimed by India. This event convinced the then Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, of the requirement to assert clearly India’s defense policy on the northern frontier. On December 6, 1950 in a statement to Parliament, Jawaharlal Nehru declared : “From time immemorial the Himalayas have provided us with magnificent frontiers. We cannot allow the barriers to be penetrated because it is also the principal barrier to India. Therefore, much as we appreciated the independence of Nepal, we cannot allow anything to go wrong in Nepal, or permit that barrier to be crossed, or weekend, because that would be a risk to our own security”²⁹. Nehru decided to visit Bhutan in the fall of 1958 to discuss the situation with the king and he

²⁷ Bhutan Foreign Policy and Government Guide, p. 67

²⁸ Pacific Affairs, Leo E. Rose, p.193-194

²⁹ Jawaharlal Nehru Speeches (1949-53), Publication Division, Government of India, 3rd cl., 1963, p.252

strongly urged the Royal Government to modify its isolation policy, at least to the extent of accepting Indian economic aid. Bhutan's immediate response was non-committal despite its own increasing concern over the developments in the north since Bhutan still hoped to avoid any involvement in the dangerous big power confrontation emerging at that time. In March 1959, a massive popular uprising against the Chinese in Lhasa was finally suppressed after several days of hard-fighting, but by this time virtually all of Central Tibet was in revolt, and the Dalai Lama with thousands of his followers fled to India. The Chinese incursions coincided with increasing pressure from New Delhi directed towards the "opening" of Bhutan and the establishment of a substantial Indian "presence" in the country. Bhutan appeared to be one of the most vulnerable points in the Indian security system.³⁰

During this time, the Bhutanese Prime Minister J.P. Dorji acted as a representative of Bhutan in India and in international affairs until his assassination in 1964. The 1960s were a dangerous period for Bhutan both externally and internally, but by the end of the decade the most serious problems had been effectively handled, if not necessarily resolved, by the king and the corps of experienced administrators upon whom he has come to depend. Prospects of the 1970s thus had appeared much brighter. Even the King's death in mid-1972, and the succession of the 17-year-old Crown Prince to the throne, did not result in a major political crisis as would certainly had been the case a few years earlier³¹.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was established in 1972 due to some constraints that arose, such as importance to have a greater acceptance and recognition of Bhutan's national identity, as well as the debate on Bhutan's admission to the United Nations. India proposed Bhutan's admission to the international organization and a resolution to this effect was quickly approved without opposition. Bhutan's formal admission at the 1971 Fall UN Session was universally welcomed in Bhutan as a major achievement. Bhutan was provided

³⁰ Pacific Affairs, Leo E. Rose, p.195-196

³¹ Pacific Affairs, Leo E. Rose, p.201-202

with a second channel of communication to the outside world, in some respects more important than the mission in New Delhi, which functioned in an Indian. Both the missions are of course in normal contact with other foreign delegations, including those of China, Pakistan, Nepal and other neighboring Asian states with which Bhutan does not have any direct bilateral relations yet. Bhutan's dependence upon India as its intermediary with the outside world was thus substantially reduced. Therefore establishment of two missions abroad and the need to maintain contacts with a growing number of foreign countries led to formation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1972. For the first time there has been a government institution responsible for foreign policy, a task that had been managed previously on an ad hoc, non-professional basis.³²

Lyonpo Dawa Tsering was appointed as the first Foreign Minister of Bhutan and the current Foreign Minister, Lyonpo Damcho Dorji is the 7th holder of this office³³. Since then Bhutan has established diplomatic relations with 52 countries and the European Union³⁴. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bhutan plays a significant role in various regional and international organizations, namely: UN, NAM, SAARC and ESCAP. The foreign office of Bhutan also chaired some important sessions in the forum of NAM, ESCAP and SAARC.

Religion and Tradition

Religion can legitimize governments as well as specific policies followed by governments. Legitimacy can be defined as "the normative belief by an actor that a rule or institution ought to be obeyed"³⁵. Religion can be a very important tool while convincing others that your policy preference is legitimate. Religion is certainly not the only source of legitimacy and there are

³² Pacific Affairs, Leo E. Rose, p.202-203

³³ <http://rulers.org/fm1.html>

³⁴ <http://www.mfa.gov.bt/about-the-ministry>

³⁵ "After Anarchy" Legitimacy & Power in the United Security Council, Ian Hurd, 2007, Princeton University Press. p.381

some set bounds on what is considered legitimate and what is not. For instance, self-defense is near-universally considered legitimate and genocide is not. However, there is a substantial middle ground where debate is possible over the legitimacy, or illegitimacy of an action, or policy. It is in this grey zone that is up to policy makers to convince others – including their constituents, other policy makers from their own state, policy makers from other states, and the population of other states – of the legitimacy of their actions and policies³⁶.

According to John C. Turner, while “the role of religious legitimacy has rarely been discussed in the context of international politics, it is often discussed in the context of domestic politics. Until a few centuries ago, it was taken for granted that religion was the basis for the legitimacy of the state itself, with the Church, as God’s agent, granting rulers the right to rule”. According to Clifford Geertz, “in this modern age, this is not entirely the case as the state’s legitimacy resting on multiple sources of legitimacy but “a strong residual element of religion continues to exist and continues to perform basic legitimizing functions”. According to Mark Juergensmeyer, many argue that this legitimizing function of religion is becoming increasingly important as governments guided by secular ideologies are seen as failing to provide basic needs like: security, economic well-being, and social justice. This is applicable with regard to foreign policy because mostly all politics, including international politics, is operated locally as the policy makers operate within state governments and to varying degree, depending on the nature of that state’s regime, need to convince domestic constituencies, and other policy makers in their own states, that the course of action they take is correct and legitimate. They also need to convince them to support, or at least to acquiesce to, those policies. Thus, if religion is a potent source of legitimacy in local politics, it can be the same for international politics³⁷.

The Kingdom of Bhutan is a Buddhist country as the state religion of Bhutan is “Vajrayana Buddhism”. Bhutan is the only country where Vajrayana Buddhism

³⁶ Jeffrey Haynes (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Politics*, p.277.

³⁷ *Routledge handbook of religion and politics*, edited by Jeffrey Haynes, p.278

is practiced in the world. Buddhists comprise two-thirds to three-quarters of its population.³⁸ In Bhutan, religion and monarchy cannot be separated as the King is not only the head of the state but he is also the protector of the Buddhist faith and culture. This can be understood by looking at the members of “Royal Advisory Council”, where two members represent the clergy. According to B.C. Upreti, foreign policy in Bhutan is an important instrument of increasing the Gross National Happiness, the alternative model of development that Bhutan has pursued over the last two decades.

A balanced foreign policy is required to attain the objectives of Gross National Happiness. This intriguing idea does not, however, appear to manifest itself in anything more profound than a statement regarding the importance of attempting to engage with globalization and foreign influences in such a way as not to undermine Bhutan’s existing Buddhist culture while increasing the country’s economic and human development. On the other hand, Leo E. Rose holds the view that the national and international affairs of Bhutan are not much influenced by the institution of religion, or religious groups. According to him, the vested interests among the elite are very influential in the formulation of Bhutan’s foreign policy.³⁹ Every Bhutanese life is directed by rituals and religion, and performing religious duties and traditions is not only a private matter but it is also a part of the public life of Bhutan. To ensure that Buddhism stays vividly alive, one son from every family usually attends a monastic school.⁴⁰

A monarchical mandate was declared in 1989 in which “*Driglam Namzha*” formed part of the official theme of the sixth Five-Year Plan (1987-1992). *Driglam Namzha* is the medieval social code of peaceful and obedient conduct, and understood abstractly sets “the principles of Bhutanese customs and traditions”, or more concretely the “national dress and language”. *Driglam*

³⁸ “International Religious Freedom Report 2007 - Bhutan”. U.S. Department of State. 2007-09-14. Retrieved 2008-01-06.

³⁹ Pacific Affairs, Leo E. Rose, p.84-88

⁴⁰ <http://www.bhutan.com/religion>

Namzha was introduced in order to make up a unique Bhutanese national identity on the basis of the culture. The introduction of the policy of *Driglam Namzha* in Bhutan indicates the importance of the influence of religious and traditional institutions in the foreign-policy making of Bhutan.

3. South Asia Security Complex

The international system has experienced a dynamic shift at the end of the Cold War. The comprehensive bipolar structure of the international security environment crumbled with the demise of the Soviet Union. Many international relations scholars and scientist have sought to explain the dynamics of this transformation, its principal features and what it means for the future of security affairs in the international system.

The importance of regional security was emphasized in the Third World Countries post the Cold War. The emphasis can be seen mainly in three areas. The first one is that regional security has become the most significant issue in the super powers' dialogue agenda. Secondly, regional wars and conflicts in the third world countries have apparently become the chief threats to the international system. Thirdly, there has been an increasing demand for regional security arrangements in the third world countries.

Regional Security Complex Theory

In order to define regional security complex theory, one should have a clear idea of definition of "region" with reference to the security concept. Barry Buzan defines a region as "a distinct and significant sub-system of security relations that exists among a set of states who have been locked into close geographic proximity with one another."⁴¹

Regional security complex theory emphasizes the inter-subjective construction of security issues by the state actors while emphasizing geographic proximity

⁴¹ Barry Buzan, *People, States & Fear. An Agenda for international Security studies in the post - cold war era.* 1991. Harvester Wheatsheaf. P 158

as the foremost generator of security concerns⁴². Buzan also identifies four primary features of a region security. Firstly, a security region must be comprised of two or more states. Secondly, the states must be in relative geographic proximity to one another, and thirdly, the security interdependence within the region is more pronounced than one on the global level. Regional analysis is considered as the practical way to understand world events because region is the intercessor between the state and the international system. Contentions that are securitized by region and that affect regional stability are projected onto both the state and international level. The interdependence of security is more intensified on a regional level than it is on a global level. Hence, most of the sovereign states generally lack the ability to project power much beyond their own regional sphere.

The traditional international relations theory argues that the global system is composed of individual units and that all of these units possess the same power to affect systemic dynamics. Hence, the relation among the units is defined by anarchy and war is an ever present reality. However since the World War II, this is no longer strictly the case. An array of multilateral institutions have spurred and sought to reject the Clausewitzian notion that war is a continuation of politics. The bottom-line ambition of these organizations has been the collective quest for creating awareness that war is not an unpalatable mechanism for actions within the international system

South Asia as defined in the domain of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), namely India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Afghanistan. Although Myanmar has been geographically and historically part of the region, it is not included into South Asia as it is not part of the regional association. The U.S. and Russia are defined as important external powers, and China is defined as an “important potential power of South Asia,” mainly because it is an immediate neighbor of South Asia. The region of South Asia continues to be one of the most important crisis

⁴² Regions and Powers : the structure of international security, Buzan and Waever Cambridge University Press, 2003. 45-46

regions in the 21st century. The region is defined by an intertwined web of new and old security risks. This region is very fragile and can ignite dangerous situations due to the unresolved territorial disputes, such as Kashmir, as well as the proliferation of nuclear weapons and also the wide range of religious, ethnic, and left-wing rebellions that have links to regional and global terrorist groups connected with organized crime. The South Asia region, unlike the Southeast and Central Asia, also lacks regional organizations for security cooperation. However, at a closer look, there is more security cooperation among member countries of the SAARC than is visible in most political and academic discussions. The collaboration is mostly bilateral and depends on the overall relationship between India and its neighbors.

Security Cooperation

Since 1990s, the region has seen expansion of security cooperation and the reason for this expansion is probably the change in India's South Asia policy. India has been inclined to make one-sided acknowledgements in bilateral conflicts and in economic cooperation. However, now India seeks its security interests through collaboration with its neighbors and not by interfering in their domestic affairs anymore. For most of the South Asian countries, the biggest security threats are ordained from the domestic challenges like, various religious, ethnic and communist rebellions rather than from external forces. Lack of institutionalization on the regional level for such security cooperation is mainly due to the different types of conflicts in this region. Regional security building is characterized by a system of different forms of collaboration. External powers outside of the region, such as the United States and China have exacerbated their relations in economic and security areas with South Asian countries. However, these extra-regional powers have only limited interest in becoming ramified in the various domestic conflicts. Hence military cooperation by these South Asian countries with extra-regional powers is not an interference for security collaboration. The European Union and Germany also have shown interest in fostering the security cooperation process due to

this region's complex security situation. In the context of bilateral cooperation, these organizations and countries can improve the national security architecture in South Asia, and at the same time may also contribute indirectly to better regional collaboration in this field.

Bhutan's Security Complex

From the perspective of India and its security system, Bhutan is the one of the most vulnerable area because of its strategic frontier and endurance of the entire Himalayan neighbors have become very important for India's security after the Chinese occupation in Tibet. The British doctrine of preventing the areas within its strategic interest is also practiced by India and hence India has always been sensitive about preserving an exclusive control in the southern Himalayan region. A vulnerable Bhutan means a vulnerable "buffer state" or "extended frontier" for India with China. In order to help Bhutan to become stronger, India has played an important role in pulling out Bhutan from its isolation policy, assisted socio-economic development and promoted Bhutan's international stature through UN membership and other multilateral organizations. India's help and support diffusely fixed to Bhutan's denial of China's assistance. Extensive assistance by India in security and defense arrangements of Bhutan with regard to military training and preparing the Royal Bhutan Army was induced by many circumstances such as location of Bhutan, which is one of the most important in India's security structure, the increase of insurgency in the North-Eastern region of India, Chinese activity in Tibet, India China Border disputes which dates back to 1914, border war between India and China in 1962 and also the increasing Chinese threat to the Indian boundaries. India's military collaboration with Bhutan is uncontroversial unlike the relationship with Nepal.

With the Friendship Treaty of August 1949, which gave India considerable leverage in handling Bhutan's foreign policy and international affairs, India also intended to protect its own security interest as well in the Himalayan region. Between 2012 and 2013, thirty-six percent of the funds from the Technical and

Economic Cooperation Program went to Bhutan.⁴³ For many years, the kingdom of Bhutan has been the biggest recipient of India's development assistance. The Indian Military Training Team was set up in 1963 for Bhutan in order to help and support the training of the Bhutanese forces.⁴⁴

Since the 1864-65 Duar war, no country has threatened Bhutan's territorial integrity. While Bhutan's southern border was always quiet due to the excellent Indo-Bhutan relationship, the greatest threat was from the northern borders. The threats were territorial intrusions, land invasions and claims against its sovereignty. Hence, the limited security forces of Bhutan have guarded the northern borders and there was not even a single security check points at the southern borders. In the recent years, ironically the major threats to the Kingdom of Bhutan have entered through the southern borders rather than the northern borders. These threats are the non-state actors from India, from its north eastern region, the insurgents from North-East India, who have been fighting for independence from India.

Since the 1990s, various militant groups which are operating in India's northeastern region had set up their camps in Bhutan's southern part. These insurgents have been using the Kingdom of Bhutan for refuge and for training to perpetrate activities against crucial infrastructure and Indian security forces. The presence of these militants on Bhutan's soil have been a great concern for Bhutan. The Bhutanese forces initiated a massive military operation in December 2003 due to the pressure from the Indian government. This was the first military operation, "Operation All Clear" ever conducted by the Royal Bhutan Army between 15th December 2003 till 3rd January 2004 and they were able to wipe out all 30 camps of the militant groups at the end of the operation.⁴⁵ Both countries have established the India-Bhutan Joint Group on Border Management and Security.⁴⁶ Bhutan has never militarized itself even if it is situated between two military giants. However after the militant crisis and

⁴³ Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, Annual Report 2012-2013 (New Delhi, 2013), 210

⁴⁴ Government of India, Ministry of Defense, Annual Report 2011-2012 (New Delhi, 2012), 190.

⁴⁵ The Kuensel, Bhutan's national newspaper reported on January 3, 2004

⁴⁶ Government of India, Ministry of Defense, Annual Report 2005-2006 (New Delhi, 2006), 198.

“Operation All Clear”, Bhutan’s security forces employ 14,209 personnel.⁴⁷ Bhutan has strengthened its security at the southern borders through regular patrolling and surveillance of the areas which are high on risk. Bhutan have also established military camps and deployed troops along the eastern and western borders too.⁴⁸

4. Bhutan’s Economic Factors

Foreign policy decisions are often influenced by the economic interest of the country. Economic factors has become one of the most significant factors in the international relations as almost all the country’s foreign policy is more and more guided by financial considerations. Economic power or might provide incomparably more political leverage than military might. Globalization is inevitable and market takeover is now more important than the annexation of territory. The growing economic interrelationship is increasingly interpreting war as antiquated.

“When it is said that economics are more important today than they had ever been, ‘economics’ can mean one, or more , of the following four things: (i) economic means (ii) economic ends (iii) economic implications and (iv) economic causes. It may mean therefore, that economic means (tariffs, quotas, currency manipulation, aid, sanctions) are now more important; or that economic ends (full employment, low inflation, growth, development) has assumed more importance; or that political and other acts today have far greater economic implications or consequences; or that a greater number of significant political and other acts and events, including the achievement of peace and the outbreak of war, have economic causes.”⁴⁹

The economic performance of landlocked developing countries reflects the direct and indirect impact of geographical situation on key-economic variables. Landlocked developing countries are generally among the poorest of the

⁴⁷ “Strengthening national security” at www.kuenselonline.com, July 25, 2004

⁴⁸ “Need to strengthen Indo-Bhutan border security” at www.kuenselonline.com, July 25, 2004

⁴⁹ “Economic Factor in International relations: A brief introduction”, Spyros, Peter, 2001. P.12

developing countries, with the weakest growth rates, and are typically heavily dependent on a very limited number of commodities for their export earnings. “Bhutan's economy, small and less developed, is based largely on hydropower, agriculture, and forestry, which provide the main livelihood for more than half of the population. Because rugged mountains dominate the terrain and make the building of roads and other infrastructure difficult and expensive, industrial production is primarily of the cottage industry type. The economy is closely aligned with India's through strong trade and monetary links and is dependent on India for financial assistance and migrant laborers for development projects, especially for road construction. Multilateral development organizations administer most educational, social, and environment programs, and take into account the government's desire to protect the country's environment and cultural traditions. For example, the government, in its cautious expansion of the tourist sector, encourages visits by upscale, environmentally conscientious tourists. Complicated controls and uncertain policies in areas such as industrial licensing, trade, labor, and finance continue to hamper foreign investment. Bhutan's largest export - hydropower to India - could spur sustainable growth in the coming years if Bhutan resolves chronic delays in construction. Bhutan currently taps only 5% of its 30,000-megawatt hydropower potential and is behind schedule in building 12 new hydropower dams with a combined capacity of 10,000 megawatts by 2020 in accordance with a deal signed in 2008 with India. The high volume of imported materials to build hydropower plants has expanded Bhutan's trade and current account deficits. However, Bhutan and India in April 2014 agreed to begin four additional hydropower projects, which would generate 2,120 megawatts in total. A declining GDP growth rate in each of the past three years in the absence of new hydropower facilities has constrained Bhutan's ability to institute economic reforms. Bhutan inked a pact in December 2014 to expand duty-free trade with Bangladesh, the only trade partner with which Bhutan enjoys a surplus.”⁵⁰

⁵⁰ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bt.html>

Economic development and the juncture of the development with regards to economic development of any country has its consequences on the country's foreign policy. Countries which has more progressed industries are more involved in international relations with other countries because these advanced countries need markets for raw materials from where they can source and also need markets where they can sell their products. These advanced countries are also always on a lookout for advanced technical know-how and knowledge. In order to fulfilled the above needs, these countries maintain close association between the groups and people of one country with their counterparts in the other country. Higher gross national product is expected from these industrially advanced countries and to allocate greater funds for economic aid program, military investment and comprehensive diplomatic commitments. On the contrary, countries which are industrially backward have not been able to involve themselves in the external affairs actively due to many factors, such a lack of skilled professionals, think tanks etc.

Bhutan's economy is predominantly rural, with more than 70 percent of its population living in rural areas⁵¹. Bhutan's economy is among the weakest economies of the world and also in comparison in the whole of South Asia. In the last 50 years of planned socio-economic development, Bhutan advanced from the conventional lap to the prerequisite for economic ascend. Several macroeconomic and human development indicators have enhanced considerably since 1980. In the first six years of the present century, Bhutan has experienced a sharp rise in average annual growth rate of real GDP to 7.9% from 5.9% in the 1990s.⁵²

⁵¹ Planning Commission : Ninth Five year Plan 2002-07, p3

⁵² National Accounts Statistics 2009, National Statistical Bureau, Bhutan.

Bhutan in South Asia, 2014**Table 1**

Country	GDP (in US\$)	Population (in million)	Surface Area (1000 sq.km)	Population Density (people per square kilometer of land area)
India	2 066 902	1 295	3287	435
Pakistan	246 876	185	796	240
Bangladesh	173 819	159	148	1222
Sri Lanka	74 941	20	65	329
Afghanistan	20 842	31	652	48
Nepal	19 636	28	147	196
Maldives	3 032	0.35	0.3	1191
Bhutan	1 821	0.76	47	20

Source: The World Bank data of 2014

Bhutan aspires to be a country where development is holistic, inclusive and sustainable. The aspiration comes from the visionary statement “Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National product” first enunciated by his Majesty the Fourth King of Bhutan in the early 1970s – long before sustainable development became a global agenda.⁵³ The economic reforms in Bhutan is based on sustainable development, which takes into account the social, financial, economic, cultural and environmental sectors while the country’s flexibility is interpreted in terms of its capability to adapt and respond effectively to changes.

During the last four decades of Bhutan’s planned economic development, the country has increased its cooperation significantly at the bilateral and multilateral levels. The strategy in development has gently started moving towards assimilating the benefits of globalization and also increase in the cooperation in international trade, through structural changes equipped at securing faster growth and economic diversification. As the economic reform process in Bhutan has not emerged from any economic crisis, there is a difference from the “conditionally driven” reforms. The economic reform process in Bhutan had been of self-adjustment based on the growing requirements of its society and economy. The changes seen in Bhutan are mainly driven by domestic needs and also due to repercussion from the external developments in the neighboring countries. Therefore, the process of economic reforms in Bhutan can be characterized as an experiment to make up for disparity in policies with regard to its major partners in economic development or from the requirement to associate in the international communities to share the benefits of liberalization.

Bhutan has actuated its effective engagement under several forums and treaties within and outside the sub region. Bhutan was given observer status in 2009 in WTO. “In 2009, the then Thinley government had almost decided to join the world trade body but withdrew at the last hour. The accession would open up

⁵³ Government of Bhutan, Letter from the Prime Minister, Jigmi Y. Thinley, 31 May 2012

trade opportunities for the country but there are questions whether Bhutan can sustain the open-door trade and promulgate enough legal tools to regulate such trade".⁵⁴ It is perhaps the longest time Bhutan has ever taken to make a decision. More than 15 years after it was granted an observer status to the World Trade Organization, opinions remain divided over what the benefits and dangers would be of joining the international body⁵⁵.

Regional Economic Cooperation

For a small country like Bhutan, which is also a landlocked country, regional economic cooperation is one of the most crucial forms of cooperation. Due to the Indo-Bhutan treaty of 1949, Bhutan and India share special bilateral relations in trade and development. The Growth Quadrangle Initiative within SAARC, comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN-GQ) have helped Bhutan in exports as well as in many other areas of economic development. The BBIN-GQ was established to step up the pace of economic development among the member countries through identification and implementation of specific projects. The sectors identified for priority attention are multi-modal transportation and communication, energy, optimal sustainable utilization of natural resource endowments, trade and investment facilitation and promotion, and tourism and environment. However, there is very little development in areas of cooperation like poverty eradication, social welfare and improvement in the quality of life even though this initiative seeks objectives beyond trade.

Bhutan has joined the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) in February 2004 at the sub-regional level outside of SAARC. The objective of this alliance was to harness shared and accelerated growth through mutual cooperation in different areas of common interests by mitigating the onslaught of globalization and by utilizing regional

⁵⁴ <http://www.bhutannewsnetwork.com/2015/04/government-to-decide-soon-on-wto-accession/>

⁵⁵ <http://www.bhutannewsnetwork.com/2014/02/bhutans-wto-dilemma/>

resources and geographical advantages. Unlike many other regional groupings, BIMSTEC is a sector-driven cooperative organization.⁵⁶

Table 2: Bhutan's trade with neighboring countries and rest of the world

Years	2009		2010		2011		2012		2013	
	Expo rts	Impo rts	Expo rts	Impo rts	Expo rts	Impo rts	Expo rts	Impo rts	Expo rts	Impo rts
India	22,41 5.5	19,84 0.8	26,00 0.9	29,32 9.1	25,76 1.5	35,19 0.8	27,82 5.6	41,82 5.6	17,75 1.9	43,66 6.4
Bangla desh	758.0	0	906.1	0	1,226. 7	0	1,172. 2	0	1,465. 0	0
Nepal	84.8	0	39.7	0	76.1	0	107.4	0	87.1	0
Others	715.4	5,682. 1	2,377. 9	9746. 1	3,805. 1	1,349 6.6	513.2	10,84 8,2	1,321. 7	8,649, 3
Total	23,97 3.9	25,52 2.9	29,32 4.4	39,07 5.2	30,86 9.5	48,68 7.4	29,61 8.4	52,67 3.8	20,62 5.7	52,31 5.7

Source: Royal Monetary Authority of Bhutan, Selected Economic Indicators, March 2015

The Table 2 does not include China, even when the country is a neighbor, mainly because of the fact that trade and economic contacts between Bhutan and China are very limited and their common border remains closed. Bhutan does not export to China. However the table below shows that there is improvement, though slowly since Bhutan open its door to China's import in 2000.

⁵⁶ <http://www.bimstec.org/index.php?page=overview>

Table 3: Bhutan's import data from China

2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Import from China													
71.8	15.8	74.1	29.1	205.3	182.2	281.7	402.7	844.7	487.3	611.0	878.3	1,330.2	1,089.3
Import shares in percentage from China													
0.8	0.2	0.8	0.3	1.1	1.1	1.5	1.9	3.6	1.9	1.6	1.8	2.5	2.1

Source: Royal Monetary Authority of Bhutan, Selected Economic Indicators

Bhutan's decision to broaden and deepen relations with India and the policy of engagement with China post-2000 indicate that when threats to national security and political culture are low, or minimal, economic opportunities guide foreign policy choices in Bhutan.⁵⁷

5. Gross National Happiness

Gross National Happiness or GNH is a policy instituted in Bhutan in the 1970s which aimed at a holistic and sustainable approach to development, which balances material and non-material values upon the conviction that humans want to search for happiness and to determine the priorities in order to maximize happiness for both individual and society.⁵⁸ The kingdom of Bhutan seems to be in a predicament to modernize and develop, while at the same time to upholding its unique traditional and cultural identity. Bhutan's ruling

⁵⁷ 'Bhutan's foreign policy determinants: An assessment', Medha Bisht, 2012. P.65

⁵⁸ <http://www.gnhcentrebbhutan.org/what-is-gnh/>

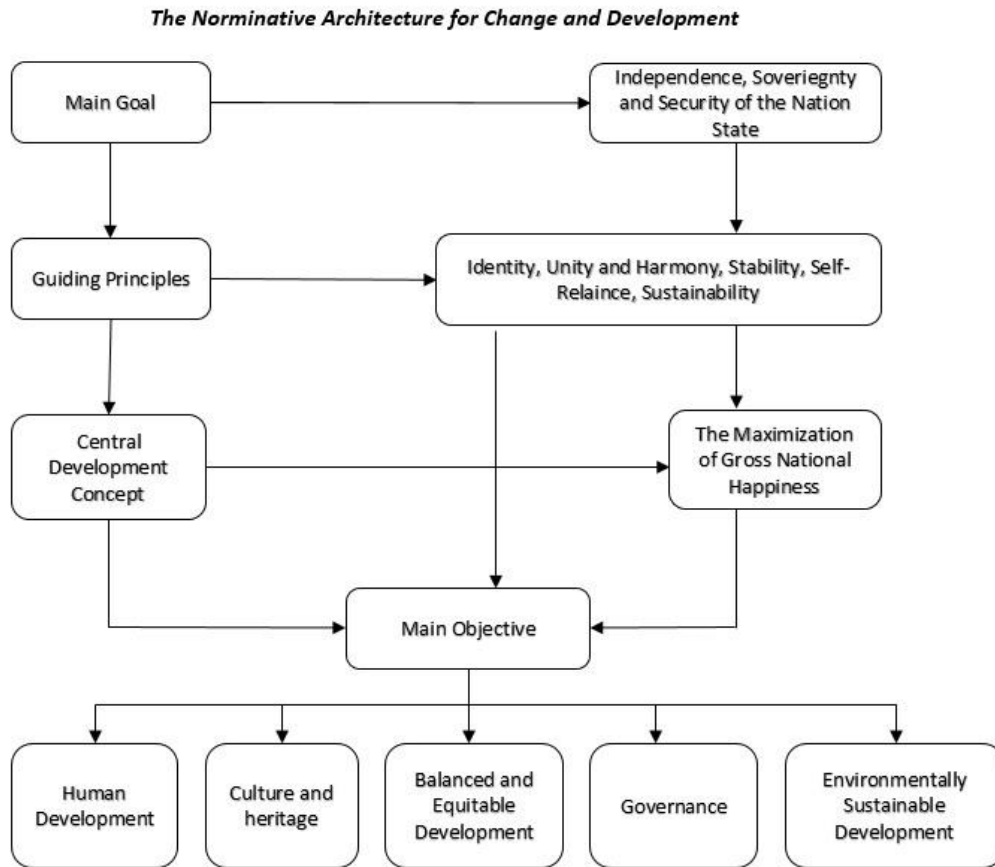
elite has adopted the Gross National Happiness as the alternate path to achieve both the objectives.

The development strategy of Bhutan seeks to strike an appropriate balance among social, economic, political, cultural and environment goals. While mapping the future development course, *Bhutan 2020: A Vision for Peace, Prosperity and Happiness* clearly brings out these goals in the “Normative Architecture for Change and Development”. The development strategy places human development at the center-stage. A holistic approach to development has been designed to take care of material as well as spiritual needs of individuals. Health and education are considered priority areas for basic capacity development towards the generation of human capital. This is to be achieved within the framework of traditional values and ethics so that the “society in transformation” continues to draw inspiration from the nation’s cultural heritage. It is crucial that sustainability be observed because an untenable proposition in any field is likely to have a negative impact on the sovereignty and security of the nation.⁵⁹ The national development vision accords the Gross National Happiness as the central development concept, one that encompasses goals, principles, objectives and direction of development.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Planning Commission, Royal Government of Bhutan, Part II

⁶⁰ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/798bhutanreport.pdf>

Figure 2.:



Source: Royal Government of Bhutan, Planning Commission, Part II, Bhutan 2020 : A Vision for Peace, Prosperity and Happiness. ⁶¹

Bhutan started the journey of modernization and development only after 1950 and follows a policy to have closer ties with India through the treaty of 1949. Nonetheless, consciously Bhutan has been making effort to allow modernization and developments to happen in a way that these developments does not damage its basic cultural ethos. After many decades of limiting its foreign aid resources to a few friendly countries like India, Bhutan has expanded its foreign aid avenues in the last few years, but it has been conscious of her goals and requirements. Bhutan Prime Minister made it clear thus: “We are looking for economic assistance from countries other than

⁶¹ <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/apcity/unpan005250.pdf>, p.15

traditional donor nations, but we are determined to ensure that such aid has no political strings attached. We shall not seek aid from either the US or the USSR as we do not wish to get involved in the super power racket".⁶²

Bhutan is also concerned about the preservation of its traditional religion and cultural identity, peace and stability, which indeed is a vital aspect of the concept of GNH. The Bhutanese ruling elite believes that its sovereignty and identity depends on the preservation of its cultural values as represented by Drukpa society and Buddhist religion. It was opined that: "This imperative, which has been linked to our identity, sovereignty and even survival as a nation state, must find clear expression in the priorities and directions we set for the future. More than 350 years ago, Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal realized that Bhutan's independence was dependent upon the formation of a distinct identity that would enable the nation to preserve its culture and religion in a world that was hostile to its existence. Today, it is the culture and tradition bequeathed to us by our ancestors that can protect us from some of the negative and indiscriminate forces of modernization and enable us to retain our identity and dignity in a world in which 'culture' is increasingly defined as a global commodity".⁶³

The concept of the GNH and the foreign policy orientation has been complementary to each other. In fact, the alternative model of development that Bhutan has pursued needs a balanced foreign policy as well as to limit its foreign policy options according to its requirements. Bhutan became a member of the United Nations in 1971. Bhutan does not have diplomatic relations with any of the permanent members of the UN Security Council, including the United States.⁶⁴ Currently, Bhutan maintains 5 embassies abroad in Bangladesh, Belgium, India, Kuwait and Thailand as well as 20 consulates and other representations. The Bhutanese capital Thimphu hosts 3 embassies, and in addition there are 6

⁶² Times Of India, September 29, 1985

⁶³ Bhutan 2020: A Vision for Peace, Prosperity and Happiness, Part II, p.34

⁶⁴ US Department of State, Diplomacy in Action. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35839.htm>

consulates and 5 other representations in Bhutan.⁶⁵ Despite not having residential diplomatic relations, Japan, Norway, Denmark, Austria, Switzerland and Netherlands are the countries which are seriously engaged in Bhutan's development in recent years. In fact, these are the countries which have taken interest in Bhutan's alternative path of development. It is clear that: (i) Bhutan's foreign policy operates in a limited framework; (ii) Bhutan's relations are confined to few countries only; (iii) Bhutan has not accepted economic assistance from the traditional donor countries whose aid is generally believed to have political strings attached to it; and (iv) Bhutan has instead accepted aid from those countries which have appreciated its model of development, and its priorities and needs. A balanced foreign policy approach is required to attain the objectives of GNH.⁶⁶

Bhutan's Foreign Policy

The bottom line of the foreign policy of any nation, small or big, is the achievement of its external goals. Bhutan is not different from other countries, the ultimate aspiration of Bhutan is also the fulfilment of its national interests. The objectives of Bhutanese foreign policy as described in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Royal Government of Bhutan are as follow:

1. Political:

- to enhance and maintain national security,
- promote world peace and security by engaging in meaningful dialogue with the international community,
- promote and contribute towards international understanding and cooperation as well as international peace and security on the basis of peaceful co-existence,

2. Economic and Trade:

⁶⁵ <http://www.embassypages.com/bhutan>

⁶⁶ Gross National Happiness and Foreign Policy of Bhutan : Interlinkages and Imperatives, B.C. Upreti. P.11

- develop and expand mutually beneficial bilateral, regional and multilateral economic and trade co-operation,
- contribute towards the development of a dynamic and a sustainable economy through mobilization of external resources.

In May 1983, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck outlined the basic framework of the foreign policy of Bhutan: “Our aim continues to be threefold: Firstly, we are committed politically to be a strong and loyal sense of nationhood to ensuring the peace and security of our citizens and the sovereign territorial integrity of our land. Secondly, to achieve economic self-reliance and thirdly to preserve the ancient religious and cultural heritage that has for so many centuries strengthened and enriched our lives”

New political and economic developments have brought changes in the foreign policy goals of Bhutan since the late sixties. Following factors have influenced the growth of Bhutanese foreign policy and its formulations.⁶⁷

- Firstly, realization of its geo-strategic importance between two Asian giant nations – China and India, has provided profound and continual impact on its foreign policy.
- Secondly, Bhutan’s treaty relations with India, heavy dependence on India economic aid and its land-locked status hindered the growth of independent diplomacy.
- Thirdly, absence of political parties and non-subscription to any of the large ideologies that determined the course of work politics until the eighties had direct bearing to the growth of country’s relatively stable but limited external relations. It never had a ‘neutral’, or ‘equi-proximity’, or ‘equi-distance’ foreign policy towards its giant neighbor. There was set foreign policy agenda in any given period of time.

⁶⁷ Bhutan, Country Study Guide, Volume 1, Strategic information and development, P. 134, 135

- Fourthly, lack of education and professional manpower, financial resources and traditional mindset of Bhutanese society also influenced the conduct of foreign policy at very minimal. As a traditional society, country's need were also very minimal in the past. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was created only in 1972, before that it was a part of Ministry of Development. Until mid-seventies, Bhutanese foreign policy was largely Indo-centric and inward looking. The growth of external relations can be grouped into four major heads: relationship with India, multilateral, regional and international bilateral relationships.

The Foreign Policy of Bhutan has operated within three basic parameters since the 1960s and they are as follows:

- internal consolidation
- gradual extension of diplomatic and economic relations
- active involvement with non-controversial regional issues.⁶⁸

Bhutan's Foreign Policy towards India

Amity towards India is the core of Bhutan's foreign policy, characterized by the evolution from an exclusive and dependent relationship to a more balanced and strategic partnership.⁶⁹ The Bhutan government decided to strengthen Indo-Bhutan relations, but to do this cautiously. Bhutan started to develop close relations with India with its two foreign policy objectives, namely: "Modernization of the economic, governmental and educational system" and "Building a modern defense capability".⁷⁰

Reiterating that India is the cornerstone of Bhutan's foreign policy, Bhutanese Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay said that the Bhutanese Government is committed to this policy, and added that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to his country is significant for the bilateral relations between the two

⁶⁸ Bhutan Steps Out, S.D. Muni, *The World Today*, (London), Vol. 40, no.12, (December, 1981), p.514-520

⁶⁹ A political and Economic Dictionary of South Asia, Mitra, Wolf, Schottli first edition, p.69

⁷⁰ K.J. Holsti, *Why Nations Realign : Foreign Policy Restructuring in the Postwar World*, (London : 1982), p.25.

countries.⁷¹ In 1958, when the magazine “China Pictorial” printed a map showing a part of Bhutan within China’s border, the National Assembly of Bhutan objected, but asked India to take up the matter with China on behalf of the Bhutan Government. This revealed the extent to which Bhutan traditionally had depended on India for the conduct of its external affairs, the basis for which was Clause 2 of the Indo-Bhutanese Treaty of 1949: “The Government of India undertakes no interference in the internal administration of Bhutan. On its part the Government of Bhutan agrees to be guided by the advice of the Government of India in regard to its external relations”⁷². The Indo-Bhutanese Treaty of 1949, which gave India control over Bhutan’s foreign relations, was renegotiated in 2007 to allow Bhutan greater sovereignty in foreign policy. However, India will likely continue to have substantial influence over Bhutanese politics.⁷³

Bhutan’s pursuit for an independent identity had lead Bhutan to act on a few occasions in opposition to India’s decision on the international forum. In 1971-72, Bhutan established relations with Bangladesh without seeking India’s approval. In 1979, Bhutan differed with India on the issue of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit in Havana regarding the Republic of Kampuchea’s admission to the UN. Bhutan also differed with India on the issue of position of landlocked countries in the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in Manila. It abstained from voting at the UN on the Afghanistan issue as it was against the presence of Soviet troops in Afghanistan.⁷⁴ It is articulated that, “Bhutan’s search for identity is usually interpreted as Bhutan’s urge to come out of the shadow of its huge southern

⁷¹ <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-india-is-cornerstone-to-bhutan-s-foreign-policy-reiterates-bhutan-pm-tshering-tobgay-1995908>

⁷² Syed Aziz-al Ahsan, Bhumitra Chakma. (1993) Bhutan’s Foreign Policy. Cautious Self-Assertion. Asian Survey, Vol 33. No.11.P. 1043

⁷³ AMB, Country Risk Report, <http://www3.ambest.com/ratings/cr/reports/Bhutan.pdf>

⁷⁴ Bhutan’s Foreign Policy Determinants : An assessment, Medha Bisht, 5th Jan 2012, p. 61

neighbor India, which had remained a dominant consideration for the regime in Thimpu since the British period.”⁷⁵

Even though Bhutan shares a very close and friendly relationship with India, it has always been mindful of the inequality between the two countries. During a very limited period of late seventies and early eighties there has been a major structural shift in its foreign policy vis-à-vis India. Bhutan perceived bilateral relations with India politically risky and uncertain, especially after the annexation of Sikkim in 1975. Hence, Bhutan opted for multilateralism in its subsequent stages of economic development in the late seventies and early eighties.⁷⁶ In contemplation of reducing the political risk, Bhutan has been expanding and transforming its international relations by applying for membership and successively becoming members in a number of international organizations. Bhutan is now a member of 154 international organizations.⁷⁷

Many small countries in South Asia play the China card while trying to balance the Indian hegemony. But Bhutan has not seen so far the need to use the China card against India because a pro-China policy for Bhutan is not a practical choice, since China is not in a position to sustain Bhutan economically in the long run. Supply lines into Bhutan favor India and not China.⁷⁸ Bhutan may not completely trust India, but Bhutan also does not consider India as a national threat. Bhutan has stood by India on issues such as its refusal to ratify the Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Comprehensive Test Ban Treaties and India's clear test in May 1998 in Pokhran even though Bhutan has neither the capability, nor the determination to develop nuclear weapons.⁷⁹

Bhutan's actions in the last few decades indicate that while maintaining good relationship with its huge neighbor India, it has also been successful in creating

⁷⁵ 'Bhutan's South Asian Initiatives', Strategic Analysis, (New Delhi), vol.VII, no.12, S.D. Muni, p.1005.

⁷⁶ Bhutan, Country Study Guide, Volume 1, Strategic information and development, P.135

⁷⁷ <http://www.mfa.gov.bt/foreign-policy/multilateral-relations>

⁷⁸ Elections in the Himalayan Kingdom : New Dawn of India-Bhutan Relations, M Shamsur Rabb Khan, 8th April 2008, <http://www.ipcs.org/article/bhutan/elections-in-the-himalayan-kingdom-new-dawn-of-india-bhutan-2540.html>

⁷⁹ A political and Economic Dictionary of South Asia, Mitra, Wolf, Schottli first edition, p.69

a unique identity and project its independent status in the international community.

Bhutan's Foreign Policy towards China

Bhutan felt vulnerable when the Chinese aggression of Tibet in 1959, the incident periled Bhutan's trust and intentions of China and Bhutan was shaken by the Chinese offensive during that time. This was the incident and the time when the King of Bhutan, Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, decided that Bhutan should come out of its isolation in order to save its sovereignty. As Bhutan is landlocked between China and India and does not share any border with any other country, the option left for Bhutan, when it felt threatened from China, was to move closer to its southern neighbor India. After 1959 Bhutan predominantly perceived national security as being synonymous with economic development. This objective was clearly articulated in 1959 when the National Assembly concluded that maintaining sovereignty of the kingdom through economic self-reliance and discovering ways and means of developing the nation should be Bhutan's primary objective.⁸⁰

Cautiously Bhutan has not so far shared any diplomatic relations with any of the permanent members of the UN Security Council, including China as Bhutan feels that it does not want to be in the power struggle of the world. Jigmi Yoser Thinley, Bhutan's then-Prime Minister expressed that "there was a time when diplomatic relations signified one's position vis-à-vis conflicting powers, choosing sides. It's no longer the case"⁸¹. The bilateral relations between Bhutan and China cannot be considered poor ever since both the countries started Sino-Bhutan Border talks in 1984, despite not having formal diplomatic ties. However the trade relation is quite minimal even though Bhutan knows that the country will benefit if the trade relations with China improve.

⁸⁰ Resolutions adopted during the 13th session of the national Assembly of Bhutan on 30th of the 8th month of Earth Hog Year corresponding to 31.10.59.

http://www.nab.gov.bt/assets/uploads/docs/resolution/2014/13th_Session.pdf

⁸¹ <http://www.bhutannewsservice.com/main-news/we-dont-need-formal-relations-with-washington-pm-thinley/>

Bhutan supported China's admission to the United Nations in 1971, recognizes PRC's One-China policy, and voted adversely when Taiwan attempted to participate in international forums. The relations between Bhutan and China is sometimes endangered by the Chinese troops' incursions into Bhutan's territory. To resolve the demarcation of the boundary line with China and also the question of intrusion of Tibetans in Bhutanese territory, and while doing so maintaining good relations and an atmosphere of friendship and co-operation with China, are the main objectives of Bhutan's foreign policy.⁸² However, the opening of direct talks between Bhutan and China for the settlement of their long-standing boundary dispute can be considered as the most important development in Bhutan's steadily evolving foreign policy. Bhutanese eagerness to have direct talks with China could be seen from the speech the Foreign Minister of Bhutan, Dawa Tshering at the Tshogudu in June 1981. He said that Bhutan would like to start direct and bilateral negotiations with China to delineate and demarcate the Bhutan-China boundary, and that the status-quo in the present Bhutan traditional border should be maintained until such time as the border negotiations were concluded.⁸³ "The Royal Government of Bhutan no doubt wants China as a friendly (or at least non-threatening) neighbor, but one with whom relations are correct rather than intimate."⁸⁴ This is how the foreign policy of a small state like Bhutan works for its survival when it is sandwiched between two powerful countries. Such a policy cannot but be ambivalent and non-antagonistic. A small state has little choice other than to maintain a low profile in dealing with its larger and more powerful

⁸² Himalayan Frontiers of India : Historical, geo-political and Strategic perspectives, K, Warikoo, 2009, p.154

⁸³ S.D. Muni, 'Sino-Bhutanese Boundary and Implications for India', Mainstream vol.XXIV, no.41, 14 June, 1986, pp. 17-20.

⁸⁴ Leo E. Rose, The politics of Bhutan, Ithaca and London (1974), p.96

neighbors. This is the strategic stand taken by Bhutan vis-à-vis China.⁸⁵ Bhutan's China policy operates in accordance with India-China relations.⁸⁶

Conclusion

Bhutan has been a very vulnerable country due to many factors, especially due to its geopolitical location. The Bhutanese leaders have enforced the foreign policy initiatives and the developmental plans judiciously. The leaders under the guidance of the king, has managed to bring up this tiny country in the global scenario without doing harm in its ecosystem. Today, the country has successfully followed the gross national happiness way of measuring country's development. Bhutan has successfully transitioned from monarchy to democracy and in maintaining its sovereignty mainly due to the foresightedness of its leaders. The country has slowly opened to the outside world but Bhutan is still yet to establish diplomatic ties with its second neighbor, China. Bhutan will be all the more cautious when it comes to changing its alliance with India due to the recent event in Nepal.

⁸⁵ Foreign policy of Bhutan : with special reference to its relations with neighbours since 1952, Shrikrishna, Kharat Rajesh, p. 161

⁸⁶ A political and Economic Dictionary of South Asia, Jivanta Schottli, Subrata K. Mitra, Siegfried Wolf, p. 69

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